

ISSUES IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

A Non-Policy Paper

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INTRODUCTION

Secondary education has suffered the fate of the “middle child”. Psychologists find that the middle child usually is given less intensive attention by the parent than the first born, and tends to take less initiative. Because the youngest child in the family often receives more attention, the middle child becomes envious. As a result, the middle child is less nurtured and more dependent upon the parents and others. Secondary education exhibits the traits of the middle child. It is frequently neglected, dependent and poorly articulated with primary and tertiary education.

Similarly, international development assistance agencies generally have treated secondary education as though it were a middle child. In the nineteen sixties and seventies, to propel rapid international development, educational planners emphasized the preparation of professional cadres at the tertiary level. Major investments were made to establish publicly-funded national systems of technical/vocational education. Subsequently, in the eighties, studies revealed that the rate of return from investments in primary education were far higher than from expensive, often elitist and ill-focused higher education. In 1990, the Forum for Education for All encouraged nations to achieve universal access to primary schooling. Subsequently, relatively less emphasis was placed on improving educational quality and on increasing access to secondary education. Since the mid-eighties, many nations and most donor organizations have invested mainly in expanding access to basic education, with priority given to primary education. Secondary education has been left to one side – unnurtured, understudied and largely adrift.

Rationale for Investment in Secondary Education

Several studies have revealed that **secondary education has played a pivotal role in achieving rapid economic growth in many emerging markets**. East Asian Tigers “took-off” not only because they had attained near universal primary education, but also because at least 40 percent of their youth, including girls, completed secondary school (World Bank, 1993). Developing nations in sub-Saharan Africa rarely have attained

similar secondary school completion rates and generally they have stagnant economies. These findings largely have been ignored by educational policy-planners. Priority has continued to be placed upon expanding enrollments at the primary level, especially in the least developed nations of Africa. In Latin America and the Caribbean, high dropout rates in primary school coupled with poor educational quality in public schools have tended, until recently, to distract planners from focusing adequately on publicly-funded secondary education.

Near universal primary education is necessary, but not sufficient, for achieving rapid economic growth. Quality primary education provides the basic skills, knowledge and conceptual abilities essential for higher-level general and technical education at the secondary level. Effective secondary education, then, should include education for team work, problem-solving and decision-making skills.

In recent years, secondary education generally has been ignored by many specialists in human capacity development. Abundant research on primary education has shown that it is highly correlated with improving family health, reducing fertility rates and increasing economic productivity (Levinger, 1995). It is generally agreed that achieving near universal primary education is essential for all nations. As a result, the field has focused mainly on the primary education portion of basic education. However, the demand for more and better secondary education is growing. Increasingly, secondary education is viewed as key to the development of skills essential for global competitiveness as well as for achieving democratic governance and civic participation in community and national decision-making.

Challenges for Secondary Education

Secondary education is profoundly affected by differing national, sub-regional and historical circumstances. However, across the board three major challenges are causing international agencies and ministries of education, labor and finance to focus new attention on secondary education:

1. The growth of global commerce and information communications combined with the need for improving national competitiveness
2. Rising demand for learning opportunities coupled with urban unrest and employment crises amongst youth and young adults
3. Unemployed rural youth who are increasingly involved in banditry and chronic violence in the rural areas of many developing nations

To help prevent conflicts, increase employment and improve productivity, ministries of education and labor increasingly are calling for the merger of technical and general education at the secondary level. Ministerial officials recognize that they must meet the needs both of students enrolled in formal education and the youth who never entered school or dropped out at a younger age. Thus, many education ministries in developing

nations are formulating plans for formal secondary schooling and non-formal skills programs for youth. Ultimately, they are crafting life-long learning systems to meet rapidly rising demands for education and skills training that will improve community well-being and productivity. **Students with real possibilities for employment and hope for a better future will help stabilize nations with chronic crises. Students who have gained critical thinking skills will become life-long learners with various occupational options.**

Increasingly, secondary education will become a critical investment strategy for nations. To accomplish this, systemic and participatory policy-planning in education must include a renewed emphasis upon secondary education and youth skills development. Clearly, the complexity of secondary education and youth skills programs is daunting, but this challenge must be met. Systemic approaches should increase national attention to meeting essential resource needs of secondary education and non-formal education programs for youth skills development. Focusing only on the financing of primary education is no longer (and perhaps never was) sufficient to provide the basis for national economic growth and social development. Indeed, the rising demand for secondary education and youth skills programs is of major concern to ministries of education throughout Africa, as well as in other regions. To ignore these demands is to risk promoting further social unrest as well as to undercut national productivity and competitiveness potential.

CURRENT PERTINENT USAID POLICY IN HUMAN CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

USAID recently established its new Agency-wide Goal for Human Capacity Development, “human capacity built through education and training” (USAID, 1998). This Goal has two Strategic Objectives; one for basic education and the other for higher education. In addition, the Goal has two cross-cutting themes, for Agency-funded training and for information technology and telecommunications.

For the purposes of USAID, basic education is defined to include “primary education, secondary education, teacher training, adult literacy and early childhood education, in both formal and non-formal settings”. Thus, secondary education is included within the framework of basic education. Higher education, in the context of USAID programs, is defined to include “universities, community colleges, vocational and training institutions and research institutes and other institutions at the post-primary level”. Therefore, in USAID, non-formal education programs for workforce development are included under this second major Agency Strategic Objective.

Although several basic education programs in Latin America, the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Asia include or have included secondary education, in recent years the vast preponderance of Agency investment has been in primary education. Teacher training programs have been supported at both the secondary and tertiary levels, depending upon the nation. Considerable numbers of programs have focused on

workforce development at the secondary level for basic general skills and technical vocational education. A major effort currently is underway in USAID to assist nations to consider their policy and structural options for combined public/private coalition building to develop new initiatives for secondary and tertiary education for increasing national competitiveness.

MAJOR ISSUES IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

Members of the USAID education community have selected for special attention several major questions relating to or critical to the expansion and improvement of secondary education:

1. How well is secondary education articulated within stated national goals, such as greater citizen participation and improved productivity?

Secondary education is adrift in many nations, floating without direction and without strategic planning. Rarely do national, district or local educational policies or plans clearly state the relationship of secondary education to attaining national goals. Policy development tends to be mainly a top-down process with little participation by local schools, parents, administrators, the private sector, tertiary level institutions and professional associations. Lacking this input, secondary school leadership mainly responds to central administrative directives rather than to a shared vision of national goals. Participatory policy dialogue, including all of the above-mentioned key actors, is required to help forge local, district-level and national consensus regarding the future roles and contributions of secondary education.

2. Are nations engaging in decentralized, regional planning for secondary education and youth programs, including non-formal as well as formal education?

Where planning for secondary education is occurring, it includes almost exclusively the formal sector, sometimes without addressing private schools. In some nations, elite leadership structures place primary emphasis upon private secondary education, while in others, public secondary education is given more importance by ministries of education (Jimenez and Lockheed, 1995). Very few nations have paid adequate attention to non-formal secondary education for out-of-school youth, some of whom have never enrolled in primary school or have dropped out after only a few years of schooling. Few studies survey the relationships between formal and non-formal secondary/youth education or study the paths of youth as they transit between the two frequently intertwined sectors. Clearly, greater attention must be paid to both formal and non-formal education to meet students' and national needs for general education and technical skills relevant to earning a living and being a productive citizen.

3. *How can secondary education be designed to help students secure skills for life-long learning and greater national competitiveness and productivity?*

A significant number of educational systems in post-colonial nations still adhere to colonial models of education. Many retain outdated examination systems that require curricula in conflict with national development goals. Often, the children of elites are able to compete favorably at examination time, though sometimes they lack the preparation required for improving national competitiveness. Traditional systems usually feature solely academic preparation and neglect project-based, hands-on, experiential education approaches. They rarely demonstrate sensitivity to marketplace needs or more broadly-based societal demands for key skills. Since many youth are winnowed out of continuing education opportunities, a large submerged group of students exists with notable aspirations but no upward access to learning resources. These alienated youth frequently become a potent force for social disruption. Alternative schools of questionable quality abound because they respond to felt needs for learning opportunities. These schools further frustrate youth by taking their families' hard-won income without providing useful skills for life and work.

Clearly, secondary education must cope with the inadequacies of primary education, as well as provide a solid lift to relevant, market responsive jobs. In some nations, special emphasis is being placed on developing combined community service and training programs of high quality that can provide effective environments for hands-on practical learning. By developing pools of appropriately skilled individuals capable of meeting market demand for productive workers, nations will have a better chance of becoming more competitive within the global marketplace.

4. *Do national policies and plans exist to increase student access to secondary education, and do these policies focus on achieving greater equity, especially for girls and other under-served groups?*

In many nations, policies have not been forged from the bottom up and thus they often fail to reflect local needs for increasing access to learning opportunities. Not only girls, but also youth living in poverty, rural youth, students of separate ethnic groups and youth with disabilities, often lack access to secondary education of good quality. In many countries, secondary education requires major financial investment by parents. As a result, only the relatively well off can attend. Little top-level support has been given to promoting local and district-level policy-planning for improving access by girls and under-served youth. Participatory policy dialogue at the local level coupled with top down support will be required to help nations address these access and equity issues.

5. *What is the educational quality of secondary education and non-formal youth programs, especially in terms of learning outcomes?*

A limited number of studies exist on the learning outcomes of secondary schools in developing nations. They reveal that students are not being prepared for careers and work that will increase national productivity and democratic growth. Greater emphasis

should be placed on developing higher cognitive and problem-solving skills. More attention should be paid to group learning through local research and service projects. Secondary education should be linked fully to the employing sector and to opportunities for micro-enterprise and small business development. In general, the contents and methods of secondary education need to be rethought, along with the consideration of new assessment systems accountable to local communities. Similarly, non-formal education programs for youth need to focus more on learning outcomes that are in line with the needs of the employing sector. In each nation, both secondary education and programs for youth skills development should be aimed at helping to increase global competitiveness.

6. Have local schools, regions and districts, as well as the nation, established standards, core competencies, curricular reforms, active teaching methods and decentralized pre- and in-service training systems for secondary education?

To increase the relevance of secondary education, greater attention needs to be paid to developing general standards and core competencies. To do this, participatory processes including communities, district-level entities and the private sector, as well as ministries of education and labor, will be required. Comprehensive curricular reforms must include linked pre- and continuous in-service training systems, as well as school support personnel, as in Uganda's Coordinating Center Tutors Program. In nations that suffer from chronic crises, equal attention needs to be placed on providing new learning opportunities to ex-combatant youth. They should be involved in community service and provided a variety of extension programs to give them a range of useful skills for reintegration into productive civilian life. They too need to learn how to learn and to prepare, flexibly, for future work.

7. Are secondary education systems developing effective plans for using new learning technologies and continuous distance learning systems?

Despite the major emphasis virtually all developing nations are placing upon new learning technologies and accessing web-based learning resources, few striking models of effective new learning systems have been implemented and evaluated as yet. Many agree that these technologies will be essential for secondary education in the 21st century. However, major investments will be needed not just in hardware but especially in the expertise required to set up self-sustaining systems. Such systems could well include community learning and information systems linked to the world of work and to community service infrastructures. Several nations are moving ahead rapidly in this area in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, the New Independent States and Asia. Some sub-Saharan African nations are beginning audacious new programs, but others have only begun to explore possibilities for expanding and improving secondary education through new learning technologies. These experiments need to be networked for rapidly sharing program models, curricular contents, educational materials, teaching/facilitation methods and assessment systems.

8. *Can nations and international donor agencies afford to expand their investments in secondary education?*

Each nation and donor agency faces severe budgetary restrictions in the education field. In most nations and agencies, educational systems require a larger proportion of general budgets than is currently the case. Until this occurs, every effort must be made to assess the systemic needs of nations while giving adequate and appropriate attention to secondary education. Each nation and agency will face tough policy choices, but it is no longer adequate to state simply that all additional funds will be invested in primary education. A more balanced, systemic approach must be taken where the needs of secondary and tertiary education are considered thoroughly and are allocated requisite core resources. A healthy tertiary system is essential for improving the quality of basic education, including both primary and secondary education.

Ministries other than education, e.g. ministries of health, rural development, industry, and labor, also must devote resources to non-formal education programs for youth. Inter-ministerial mechanisms, along with the participation of semi-autonomous institutes, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and professional associations, will need to be developed to ensure long-term sustainable support for both formal and non-formal secondary education programming. During the coming decade, due to its compelling needs for trained manpower, it is expected that the private sector will increase its proportionate share of investment in secondary and youth education.

9. *How can concerns for expansion and quality of secondary education be integrated better into Education for All?*

Clearly, during the second decade of Education for All, greater attention must be paid to secondary education within a framework of policy dialogue and systemic planning. However, developing nations should assiduously avoid declaring universal secondary education before they can ensure an acceptable level of quality education. Indeed, some of us believe that Education for All should be changed to “Learning for All” (Hartwell and Vargas-Baron, 1998). In some nations, it may well be preferable to offer non-formal learning programs of high quality for youth instead of formal schooling of questionable quality or relevance. This is particularly important for nations with low enrollments in primary education, or high repetition and attrition rates. Each nation will have to make its choices in this regard or possibly suffer the consequences of the growth of “fly by night” technical schools poorly linked to the demands of the employing sector. High-quality, non-formal education programs should have multiple entry and exit opportunities that are tied to real employment options or to programs promoting self-employment activities. Examples of such programs in Africa include Empretech in Ghana and AGETIP in Senegal. (Aring et al, 1996).

PRIORITIES FOR USAID ACTION

1. State of the Art Review of Secondary Education

A review of the literature on secondary education in developing countries has revealed the utter lack of any recent comprehensive state of the art papers. Given this major gap in the literature, in collaboration with UNESCO and other donor agencies, USAID proposes to assist with funding the preparation of a state of the art paper on secondary education. The paper will assess the current status of secondary education, note gaps in our knowledge, and make recommendations about future policy, programming initiatives and critically needed studies.

2. Assistance to Nations for Policy Dialogue, Appraisals, Diagnostics and Vision and Action Consensus Building

Within a systemic approach to educational development and national goal setting, special priority will be placed on assisting nations to conduct public/private policy dialogues and appraisals to expand and improve secondary education systems, including formal and non-formal education. A new contracting mechanism is currently being established to assist USAID missions, in partnership with host-countries, to conduct such participatory policy and planning activities. Similarly, dynamic workforce diagnostic tools will help provide the discipline to forge relevant connections between secondary education, youth skills programs and the employing sectors.

3. Youth in Crisis

Using the Global Information Networks in Education (GINIE), USAID will place a special emphasis on sharing new models of education that provide appropriate secondary-level formal and non-formal learning opportunities in nations in crisis or post-crisis transition (McClure, 1999). Youth will be emphasized as key resources for national development through the promotion of peer teaching approaches, the integration of health decision making for self-management, and the linkage of secondary education to family planning and reproductive health programs. Such programs should include conflict resolution, mediation training and peer teaching at the primary school-age level to ensure early exposure to new behaviors conducive to peaceful conduct. Major emphasis will be placed on learning relevant to the formation of new skills for improving economic potential combined with community service in both urban and rural environments. Care will be taken to avoid abusive child labor and to promote basic education as a positive alternative to such labor.

4. Distance Learning for Secondary Education

In collaboration with nations and other donor agencies interested in developing new approaches, innovative models of distance learning, including both interactive radio and web-based learning, will be established and evaluated for wide dissemination. Teacher training support systems and networks will be emphasized, building upon earlier

successful work in developing decentralized and continuous in-service teacher training systems. In relevant nations, special attention will be paid to the needs of secondary education for bilingual and multilingual populations as well as networking between and amongst such groups.

5. Identifying and Sharing Best Practices and Lessons Learned

Few studies exist regarding best practices and lessons learned in secondary education in developing nations. Although a large literature exists on secondary education in industrialized nations, few researchers have devoted major attention to the secondary level in developing nations, and even more rarely in countries in crisis or transition. During the coming months, USAID will consider entering into collaborations with UNESCO and other agencies to address this major need.

6. Innovative Pilot Activities

On a limited basis and in close collaboration with nations that have decided to place major emphasis upon improving access and the quality of secondary education, USAID missions will consider providing support for innovative pilot activities designed to be scaled up within national systems of formal or non-formal education.

TEN SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

1. Contribution to the State of the Art Review

We recommend that other donor agencies consider joining in this review activity in order to make it as comprehensive and participatory as possible.

2. Secondary Education Website Support

UNESCO's proposal for creating a secondary education website merits special attention. USAID fully supports this initiative and proposes to provide partial funding for this activity through its on-going programs.

3. Youth Advisory Council on Secondary Education

We recommend that a Youth Advisory Council on Secondary Education be established to help ensure the relevance of donor agency programs to the prevailing concerns of today's youth. This Advisory Council could include sub-sections devoted to special interests, such as indigenous youth, girls, youth with disabilities, youth in crisis nations, and unemployed youth. It is crucial to bring youth of secondary school age and their parents into the dialogue to ensure program relevance. Special funding support would need to be secured in order to achieve appropriate youth participation over a sustained period of time.

4. Establishment of an International Working Group on Secondary Education

As a result of the first Consortium Meeting on Secondary Education convened by UNESCO from June 9 to 10, 1999, we recommend the establishment of an International Working Group on Secondary Education. The International Working Group could include active participation by donor agencies, representatives of the proposed Youth Advisory Council and relevant international non-governmental organizations with extensive records of achievement in addressing the needs of secondary and youth education.

5. Donor Coordination

A special effort should be made by nations to guide donor coordination for investment in formal and non-formal secondary education initiatives at the national level in both the public and private sectors. To complement national initiatives, the proposed International Working Group on Secondary Education could regularly review major accomplishments, emerging needs and prevailing concerns regarding donor collaboration for improving and expanding secondary education in specific nations, upon request, and in each world region.

6. Promotion of Educational Finance Studies

Broad-ranging educational finance studies could be commissioned to review national budgets for identifying potential new sources of revenue for education in general, with emphasis on secondary education and non-formal youth skills programs. These assessments should include the entire array of national resources and obligations, including national defense and infrastructural investments. Close attention simultaneously should be paid to developing new avenues for community, regional and local coordination and resource development.

7. Promotion of Multiethnic Societies through Secondary Education Curricula and Activities

Given the increase of inter-ethnic conflict in many nation states and the imperative of preventing future crises, a special program might be considered for combined donor support to help develop core curricula and teaching methods for youth on issues of inter-ethnic respect, conflict resolution and mediation. In addition, special youth activities that build new behaviors and attitudes could be considered, such as Model United Nations competitions, community service programs, peer teaching of primary school students, web-based student exchanges, environmental protection activities involving separate ethnic groups, broadly-based school to work programs and many others.

8. Higher Education Volunteer Mentors for Improving Secondary Education

In addition to improving pre- and in-service training for secondary education, donor agencies might consider promoting the development of National Volunteer Corps for

improving the quality of secondary education and youth skills programs. Students from universities and technical institutes could serve as volunteer mentors, tutors and role models for youth, encouraging them to complete their secondary or technical schooling. These volunteer services could yield a reduction of cost per student by lowering attrition and repetition rates, and ultimately, they could result in a higher return on investment for secondary education and youth skills development.

9. Secondary Schools Systems Linkages Program

In the USA and a few other industrialized nations, sub-regional school collaborations have been forged that link secondary schools to four-year universities, two-year community colleges and the private sector. As an extension of the Associated Schools Program of UNESCO, a new effort could be considered to link secondary school systems regionally within and between nations. This could be accomplished initially by convening an international meeting of sub-regional secondary and youth skills programs interested in forging strategic international alliances, and subsequently, by creating web-based program exchange activities of direct tangible benefit to all parties.

10. Partnerships with Non-Governmental Organizations for Public Participation and the Decentralization of Secondary Education

In several nations, non-governmental organizations and private schools dominate the provision of secondary education. In such nations, special initiatives could be considered that would link secondary school governance more closely to the development of civil society. They could help to forge new systems of democratic governance. Donor agencies might consider collaborative activities that develop a mosaic of support for strengthening the relationships between secondary schools and national non-governmental organizations focused on the development of civil society.

CONCLUSION

The possibilities for improving and expanding secondary education and youth programs in developing nations are literally limitless, but the immediate challenges are many. Will secondary education continue to play the role of the “middle child”? Will new systems of policy dialogue and appraisal be developed to meet the needs for quality secondary education and for non-formal education programs serving youth? Will national education leaders, financial planners and the private sector give secondary education and youth skills programs adequate attention and resources?

By focusing special attention on policy-planning for secondary and youth education, multilateral and bilateral donors, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, the private sector and youth coalitions, could advocate for the formation of innovative life-long learning systems that are community-based and nationally responsible. These new learning systems could promote not only economic growth for national competitiveness, but also inter-ethnic respect, understanding and collaboration as

essential prerequisites for forging strong civil societies and more effective governance. If this is not accomplished, it is expected that social unrest resulting from unemployed and disaffected youth and young adults will propel more chronic crises world-wide. For these reasons, we believe that the bold development of a secondary education and youth initiative is both necessary and timely.

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